APPENDIX I

THE ORTHODOX TEACHING OF

St. Mark of Ephesus

ON THE STATE OF SOULS AFTER DEATH

THE ORTHODOX TEACHING on the state of souls after death is one that is often not fully understood, even by Orthodox Christians themselves; and the comparatively late Latin teaching of "purgatory" has caused further confusion in people's minds. The Orthodox doctrine itself, however, is not at all ambiguous or imprecise. Perhaps the most concise Orthodox exposition of it is to be found in the writings of St. Mark of Ephesus at the Council of Florence in 1439, composed precisely in order to answer the Latin teaching on "purgatory." These writings are especially valuable to us in that coming as they do from the last of the Byzantine Fathers, before the modern era with all its theological confusions, they both point us to the sources of the Orthodox doctrine and instruct us how to approach and understand these sources. These sources are: Scripture, Patristic homilies, church services, Lives of Saints, and certain revelations and visions of life after death, such as those contained in Book IV of the *Dialogues* of St. Gregory the Great. Today's academic theologians tend to mistrust the latter two or three kinds of sources, which is why they are often uneasy when

speaking on this subject and sometimes prefer to keep an "agnostic reticence" with regard to it (Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, p. 259). St. Mark's writings, on the other hand, show us how much "at home" with these sources genuine Orthodox theologians are; those who are "uncomfortable" with them perhaps reveal thereby an unsuspected infection with modern unbelief.

Of St. Mark's four replies on purgatory composed at the Council of Florence, the First Homily contains the most concise account of the Orthodox doctrine as against the Latin errors, and it is chiefly from it that this translation has been compiled. The other replies contain mostly illustrative material for the points discussed here, as well as answers to more specific Latin arguments.

The "Latin Chapter" to which St. Mark replies are those written by Julian Cardinal Cesarini (Russian translation in Pogodin, pp. 50–57), giving the Latin teaching, defined at the earlier "Union" Council of Lyons (1270), on the state of souls after death. This teaching strikes the Orthodox reader (as indeed it struck St. Mark) as one of an entirely too "literalistic" and "legalistic" character. The Latins by this time had come to regard heaven and hell as somehow "finished" and "absolute," and those in them as already possessing the fullness of the state they will have after the Last Judgment; thus, there is no need to pray for those in heaven (whose lot is already perfect) or those in hell (for they can never be delivered or cleansed from sin). But since many of the faithful die in a "middle" state — not perfect enough for heaven, but not evil enough for hell — the logic of the Latin arguments required a third place of cleansing ("purgatory"), where even those whose sins had already been forgiven had to be punished or give "satisfaction" for their sins before being sufficiently cleansed to enter heaven. These legalistic arguments of a purely human "justice" (which actually deny God's supreme goodness and love of mankind) the Latins proceeded to support by literalistic interpretations of certain Patristic texts and various visions; almost all of these interpretations are quite contrived and arbitrary, because not even the ancient Latin Fathers spoke of such a

place as "purgatory," but only of the "cleansing" from sins after death, which some of them referred to (probably allegorically) as by "fire."

In the Orthodox doctrine, on the other hand, which St. Mark teaches, the faithful who have died with small sins unconfessed, or who have not brought forth fruits of repentance for sins they have confessed, are cleansed of these sins either in the trial of death itself with its fear, or after death, when they are confined (but not permanently) in hell, by the prayers and Liturgies of the Church and good deeds performed for them by the faithful. Even sinners destined for eternal torment can be given a certain relief from their torment in hell by these means also. There is no fire tormenting sinners now, however, either in hell (for the eternal fire will begin to torment them only after the Last Judgment), or much less in any third place like "purgatory"; all visions of fire which are seen by men are as it were images or prophecies of what will be in the future age. All forgiveness of sins after death comes solely from the goodness of God, which extends even to those in hell, with the cooperation of the prayers of men, and no "payment" or "satisfaction" is due for sins which have been forgiven.

It should be noted that St. Mark's writings concern primarily the specific point of the *state* of souls after death, and barely touch on the history of the events that occur to the soul immediately after death. On the latter point there is an abundant Orthodox literature, but this point was not under discussion at Florence.

All notes have been added by the translators.

FIRST HOMILY

REFUTATION OF THE LATIN CHAPTERS CONCERNING PURGATORIAL FIRE[1]

INASMUCH AS WE are required, preserving our Orthodoxy and the church dogmas handed down by the Fathers, to answer with love to what you have said, as our general rule we shall first quote each argument and testimony

which you have brought forward in writing, in order that the reply and resolution to each of them might then follow briefly and clearly.

1. And so, at the beginning of your report you speak thus: “If those who truly repent have departed this life in love (towards God) before they were able to give satisfaction by means of worthy fruits for their transgressions or offenses, their souls are cleansed after death by means of purgatorial sufferings; but for the easing (or ‘deliverance’) of them from these sufferings, they are aided by the help which is shown them on the part of the faithful who are alive, as for example: prayers, Liturgies, almsgiving, and other works of piety.”

To this we answer the following: Of the fact that those reposed in faith are without doubt helped by the Liturgies and prayers and almsgiving performed for them, and that this custom has been in force from antiquity, there is the testimony of many and various utterances of the Teachers, both Latin and Greek, spoken and written at various times and in various places. But that souls are delivered thanks to a certain purgatorial suffering and temporal fire which possesses such (a purgatorial) power and has the character of a help — this we do not find either in the Scriptures or in the prayers and hymns for the dead, or in the words of Teachers. But we have received that even the souls which are held in hell and are already given over to eternal torments, whether in actual fact and experience or in hopeless expectation of such, can be aided and given a certain small help, although not in the sense of completely loosing them from torment or giving hope for a final deliverance. And this is shown from the words of the great Macarius the Egyptian ascetic who, finding a skull in the desert, was instructed by it concerning this by the action of Divine Power.[2] And Basil the Great, in the prayers read at Pentecost, writes literally the following: “Who also, on this all-perfect and saving feast, are graciously pleased to accept propitiatory prayers for those who are imprisoned in hell, granting us a great hope of improvement for those who are imprisoned from the defilements which have imprisoned them, and that Thou wilt send down Thy consolation” (Third Kneeling Prayer at Vespers).

But if souls have departed this life in faith and love, while nevertheless carrying away with themselves certain faults, whether small ones over which they have not repented at all, or great ones for which — even though they have repented over them — they did not undertake to show fruits of repentance: such souls, we believe, must be cleansed from this kind of sins, but not by means of some purgatorial fire or a definite punishment in some place (for this, as we have said, has not at all been handed down to us). But some must be cleansed in the very departure from the body, thanks only to fear, as St. Gregory the Dialogist literally shows;[3] while others must be cleansed after the departure from the body, either while remaining in the same earthly place, before they come to worship God and are honored with the lot of the blessed, or — if their sins were more serious and bind them for a longer duration — they are kept in hell, but not in order to remain forever in fire and torment, but as it were in prison and confinement under guard.

All such ones, we affirm, are helped by the prayers and Liturgies performed for them, with the cooperation of the Divine goodness and love for mankind. This Divine cooperation immediately disdains and remits some sins, those committed out of human weakness, as Dionysius the Great (the Areopagite) says in the "Reflections on the Mystery of Those Reposed in Faith" (in *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy,* VII, 7); while other sins, after a certain time, by righteous judgments it either likewise releases and forgives — and that completely — or lightens the responsibility for them until that final Judgment. And therefore we see no necessity whatever for any other punishment or for a cleansing fire; for some are cleansed by fear, while others are devoured by the gnawings of conscience with more torment than any fire, and still others are cleansed only by the very terror before the Divine Glory and the uncertainty as to what the future will be. And that this is much more tormenting and punishing than anything else, experience itself shows, and St. John Chrysostom testifies to us in almost all or at least most of his moral homilies, which affirm this, as likewise does the divine ascetic Dorotheus in his homily "On the Conscience ..."

2. And so, we entreat God and believe to deliver the departed from (eternal torment), and not from any other torment or fire apart from those torments and that fire which have been proclaimed to be forever. And that, moreover, the souls of the departed are delivered by prayer from confinement in hell, as if from a certain prison, is testified, among many others, by Theophanes the Confessor, called the Branded (for the words of his testimony for the Icon of Christ, words written on his forehead, he sealed by blood). In one of the canons for the reposed he thus prays for them: "Deliver, O Saviour, Thy slaves who are in the hell of tears and sighing" (Octoechos, Saturday canon for the reposed, Tone 8, Canticle 6, Glory).

Do you hear? He said "tears" and "sighing," and not any kind of punishment or purgatorial fire. And if there is to be encountered in these hymns and prayers any mention of fire, it is not a temporal one that has a purgatorial power, but rather that eternal fire and unceasing punishment. The saints, being moved by love for mankind and compassion for their fellow countrymen, desiring and daring what is almost impossible, pray for the deliverance of those departed in faith. For thus does St. Theodore the Studite, the confessor and witness of the truth himself, say, at the very beginning of his canon for the departed: "Let us all entreat Christ, performing a memorial today for those dead from the ages, that He might deliver from eternal fire those departed in faith and in hope of eternal life" (*Lenten Triodion,* Meat-Fare Saturday, Canon, Canticle 1). And then, in another troparion, in Canticle 5 of the Canon, he says: "Deliver, O our Saviour, all who have died in faith from the ever-scorching fire, and unillumined darkness, the gnashing of teeth, and the eternally-tormenting worm, and all torment."

Where is the "purgatorial fire" here? And if it in fact existed, where would it be more appropriate for the Saint to speak of it, if not here? Whether the saints are heard by God when they pray for this is not for us to search out. But they themselves knew, as did the Spirit dwelling in them by Whom they were moved, and they spoke and wrote in this knowledge; and likewise the Master Christ knew this, Who gave the commandment that we

should pray for our enemies, and Who prayed for those who were crucifying Him, and inspired the First Martyr Stephen, when he was being stoned to death, to do the same. And although someone might say that when we pray for such people we are not heard by God, still we shall do everything that depends on us. And behold, some of the saints who prayed not only for the faithful, but even for the impious, were heard and by their prayers rescued them from eternal torment, as for example the First Woman-martyr Thecla rescued Falconila, and the divine Gregory the Dialogist, as it is related, rescued the Emperor Trajan.[4]

(Chapter 3 demonstrates that the Church prays also for those already enjoying blessedness with God — who, of course, have no need to go through "purgatorial fire.")

4. After this, a little further on, you desired to prove the above-mentioned dogma of purgatorial fire, at first quoting what is said in the book of Maccabees: *It is holy and pious ... to pray for the dead ... that they might be delivered from their sin* (II Maccabees 12:44–45). Then, taking from the Gospel according to Matthew the place in which the Saviour declares that *whosoever shall speak against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, nor in that which is to come* (Matt. 12:32), you say that from this one may see that there is a remission of sins in the future life.

But that from this there in no way follows the idea of purgatorial fire is clearer than the sun; for what is there in common between remission on the one hand, and cleansing by fire and punishment on the other? For if the remission of sins is accomplished for the sake of prayers, or merely by the Divine love of mankind itself, there is no need for punishment and cleansing (by fire). But if punishment, and also cleansing, are established (by God) ... then, it would seem, prayers (for the reposed) are performed in vain, and vainly do we hymn the Divine love of mankind. And so, these citations are less a proof of the existence of purgatorial fire than a refutation of it: for the remission of sins of those who have transgressed is presented in them as the result of a certain royal authority and love of mankind, and not as a deliverance from punishment or a cleansing.

5. Thirdly, (let us take) the passage from the first epistle of the Blessed Paul to the Corinthians, in which he, speaking of the building on the foundation, which is Christ, of *gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay, stubble,* adds: *For that day shall declare it, because it is revealed in fire; and the fire itself shall prove each man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work shall abide which he built thereon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire* (I Cor. 3:11–15). This citation, it would seem, more than any other introduces the idea of purgatorial fire; but in actual fact it more than any other refutes it.

First of all, the Divine Apostle called it not a purgatorial, but a proving (fire); then he declared that through it good and honorable works also must pass, and such, it is clear, have no need of any cleansing; then he says that those who bring evil works, after these works burn, suffer loss, whereas those who are being cleansed not only suffer no loss, but acquire even more; then he says that this must be on "that day," namely, the day of Judgment and of the future age, whereas to suppose the existence of a purgatorial fire after that fearful Coming of the Judge and the final sentence — is this not a total absurdity? For the Scripture does not transmit to us anything of the sort, but He Himself Who will judge us says: *And these shall go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life* (Matt. 25:46); and again: *They shall come forth: they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgment* (John 5:29). Therefore, there remains no kind of intermediate place; but after He divided all those under judgment into two parts, placing some on the right and others on the left, and calling the first "sheep" and the second "goats" — He did not at all declare that there are any who are to be cleansed by that fire. It would seem that the fire of which the Apostle speaks is the same as that of which the Prophet David speaks: *Fire shall blaze before Him, and round about Him shall there be a mighty tempest* (Ps. 49:4); and again: *Fire shall go before Him, and shall burn up His enemies round about* (Ps. 96:3). Daniel the Prophet also speaks about

this fire: *A stream of fire issued and came forth from before Him* (Daniel 7:10).

Since the saints do not bring with them any evil work or evil mark, this fire manifests them as even brighter, as gold tried in the fire, or as the stone amianthus, which, as it is related, when placed in fire appears as charred, but when taken out of the fire become even cleaner, as if washed with water, as were also the bodies of the Three Youths in the Babylonian furnace. Sinners, however, who bring evil with themselves, are seized as a suitable material for this fire and are immediately ignited by it, and their "work," that is, their evil disposition or activity, is burned and utterly destroyed and they are deprived of what they brought with them, that is, deprived of their burden of evil, while they themselves are "saved" — that is, will be preserved and kept forever, so that they might not be subjected to destruction together with their evil.

6. The divine Father Chrysostom also (who is called by us "the lips of Paul," just as the latter is "the lips of Christ") considers it necessary to make such an interpretation of this passage in his commentary on the Epistle (Homily 9 on First Corinthians); and Paul speaks through Chrysostom, as was made clear thanks to the vision of Proclus, his disciple and the successor of his See.[5] St. Chrysostom devoted a special treatise to this one passage, so that the Origenists would not quote these words of the Apostle as confirmation of their way of thought (which, it would seem, is more fitting for them than for you), and would not cause harm to the Church by introducing an end to the torment of hell and a final restoration (*apocatastasis*) of sinners. For the expression that the sinner *is saved as through fire* signifies that he will remain tormented in fire and will not be destroyed together with his evil works and evil disposition of soul.

Basil the Great also speaks of this in the "Morals," in interpreting the passage of Scripture, *the voice of the Lord Who divideth the flame of fire* (Ps. 28:7): "The fire prepared for the torment of the devil and his angels, is divided by the voice of the Lord, so that after this there might be two powers in it: one that burns, and another that illumines; the tormenting and punishing power of that fire is reserved for those worthy of torment; while

the illumining and enlightening power is intended for the shining of those who rejoice. Therefore the voice of the Lord Who divides and separates the flame of fire is for this: that the dark part might be a fire of torment and the unburning part a light of enjoyment" (St. Basil, Homily on Psalm 28).

And so, as may be seen, this division and separation of that fire will be when absolutely everyone will pass through it: the bright and shining works will be manifest as yet brighter, and those who bring them will become inheritors of the light and will receive that eternal reward; while those who bring bad works suitable for burning, being punished by the loss of them, will eternally remain in fire and will inherit a salvation which is worse than perdition, for this is what, strictly speaking, the word "saved" means — that the destroying power of fire will not be applied to them and they themselves be utterly destroyed. Following these Fathers, many other of our Teachers also have understood this passage in the same sense. And if anyone has interpreted it differently and understood "salvation" as "deliverance from punishment," and "going through fire" as "purgatory" — such a one, if we may so express ourselves, understands this passage in an entirely wrong way. And this is not surprising, for he is a man, and many even among the Teachers may be seen to interpret passages of Scripture in various ways, and not all of them have attained in an equal degree the precise meaning. It is not possible that one and the same text, being handed down in various interpretations, should correspond in an equal degree to all the interpretations of it; but we, selecting the most important of them and those that best correspond to church dogmas, should place the other interpretations in second place. Therefore, we shall not deviate from the above-cited interpretation of the Apostle's words, even if Augustine or Gregory the Dialogist or another of your Teachers should give such an interpretation; for such an interpretation answers less to the idea of a temporary purgatorial fire than to the teaching of Origen which, speaking of a final restoration of souls through that fire and a deliverance from torment, was forbidden and given over to anathema by the Fifth Ecumenical Council, and was definitively overthrown as a common impiety for the Church.

(In chapters 7 through 12, St. Mark answers objections raised by quotations from the works of Blessed Augustine, St. Ambrose, St. Gregory the Dialogist, St. Basil the Great, and other Fathers, showing that they have been misinterpreted or perhaps misquoted and that these Fathers actually teach the Orthodox doctrine, and if not, then their teaching is not to be accepted. Further, he points out that St. Gregory of Nyssa does not teach about "purgatory" at all, but holds the much worse error of Origen, that there will be an end to the eternal flames of hell — although it may be that these ideas were placed in his writings later by Origenists.)

13. And finally you say: "The above-mentioned truth is evident from the Divine Justice, which does not leave unpunished anything that was done amiss, and from this it necessarily follows that for those who have not undergone punishment here, and cannot pay it off either in heaven or in hell, it remains to suppose the existence of a different, a third place in which this cleansing is accomplished, thanks to which each one, becoming cleansed, is immediately led up to heavenly enjoyment."

To this we say the following, and pay heed how simple and at the same time how just this is: it is generally acknowledged that the remission of sins is at the same time also a deliverance from punishment; for the one who receives remission of them at the same time is delivered from the punishment owed for them. Remission is given in three forms and at different times: (1) during Baptism; (2) after Baptism, through conversion and sorrow and making up (for sins) by good works in the present life; and (3) after death, through prayers and good deeds and thanks to whatever else the Church does for the dead.

Thus, the first remission of sins is not at all bound up with labor; it is common to all and equal in honor, like the pouring out of light and the beholding of the sun and the changes of the seasons of the year, for this is grace alone and of us is asked nothing else but faith. But the second remission is painful, as for one who *every night washes his bed, and with tears waters his couch* (Ps. 6:5), for whom even the traces of the blows of sin are painful, who goes weeping and with contrite face and emulates the conversion of the Ninevites and the humility of Manasses, upon which there

was mercy. The third remission is also painful, for it is bound up with repentance and a conscience that is contrite and suffers from insufficiency of good; however, it is not at all mixed with punishment, if it is a remission of sins: for remission and punishment can by no means exist together. Moreover, in the first and last remission of sins the grace of God has the larger part, with the cooperation of prayer, and very little is brought in by us. The middle remission, on the other hand, has little from grace, while the greater part is owing to our labor. The first remission of sins is distinguished from the last by this; that the first is a remission of all sins in an equal degree, while the last is a remission only of those sins which are not mortal and over which a person has repented in life.

Thus does the Church of God think, and when entreating for the departed the remission of sins and believing that it is granted them, it does not define as a law any kind of punishment with relation to them, knowing well that the Divine goodness in such matters conquers the idea of justice.

FROM THE SECOND HOMILY AGAINST PURGATORIAL FIRE[6]

3. We affirm that neither the righteous have as yet received the fullness of their lot and that blessed condition for which they have prepared themselves here through works, nor have sinners, after death, been led away into the eternal punishment in which they shall be tormented eternally. Rather, both the one and the other must necessarily take place after the Judgment of that last day and the resurrection of all. Now, however, both the one and the other are in places proper to them: the first, in absolute repose and free, are in heaven with the angels and before God Himself, and already as if in the paradise from which Adam fell (into which the good thief entered before others) and often visit us in those temples where they are venerated, and hear those who call on them and pray for them to God, having received from Him this surpassing gift, and through their relics perform miracles, and take delight in the vision of God and the illumination

sent from Him more perfectly and purely than before, when they were alive; while the second, in their turn, being confined in hell, remain *in the lowest pit, in darkness and in the shadow of death* (Ps. 87:7), as David says, and then Job: *to the land where light is as darkness* (Job 10:21–22). And the first remain in every joy and rejoicing, already expecting and only not having in their hands the Kingdom and the unutterable good things promised them; and the second, on the contrary, remain in all confinement and inconsolable suffering, like condemned men awaiting the Judge's sentence and foreseeing those torments. Neither have the first yet received the inheritance of the Kingdom and those good things *which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man* (I Cor. 2:9); nor have the second yet been given over to eternal torments nor to burning in the unquenchable fire. And this teaching we have as handed down from our Fathers in antiquity, and we can easily present it from the Divine Scriptures themselves.

10. That which certain of the saints have seen in vision and revelation regarding the future torment of the impious and sinners who are in it are certain images of future things and as it were depictions, and not what is already in fact happening now. Thus, for example, Daniel, describing that future Judgment, says: *As I looked, thrones were placed and one that was ancient of days took his seat ... and the books were opened* (Daniel 7:9–10), whereas it is clear that this in very fact has not taken place, but was revealed in the spirit beforehand to the Prophet.

19. When we examine the testimonies which you have cited from the book of Maccabees and the Gospel, speaking simply with love for the truth, we see that they do not at all contain any testimony of some kind of punishment or cleansing, but speak only of the remission of sins. You have made a certain astonishing division, saying that every sin must be understood under two aspects: (1) the offense itself which is made to God, and (2) the punishment which follows it. Of these two aspects (you teach), the offense to God, indeed, can be remitted after repentance and turning away from evil, but the liability to punishment must exist in every case; so

that, on the basis of this idea, it is essential that those released from sins should all the same be subject to punishment for them.

But we allow ourselves to say that such a stating of the question contradicts clear and commonly known truths: if we do not see that a king, after he has granted an amnesty and pardon, subjects the guilty to yet more punishment, then all the more God, among Whose many characteristics love of mankind is an especially outstanding one, even though He does punish a man after a sin which he has committed, still, after He has forgiven him He immediately delivers him from punishment also. And this is natural. For if the offense to God leads to punishment, then when the guilt is forgiven and reconciliation has occurred, the very consequence of the guilt — the punishment — of necessity comes to an end.